

Where credit is due

New 90 percent attendance policy unfair standard for students, parents

On Dec. 16, McCallum parents received a letter from principal Mike Garrison outlining the details of the new attendance policy put into effect on Jan. 1. The most significant change for parents and their children is that students attend 90 percent of the days in each class in order to earn credit for that course.

This means the student can only miss three or four classes or fewer per semester. Another change causing controversy among parents and students is the new policy regarding which kinds of absences count against the policy and which do not. Among these unexcused absences that count are any cause by an illness that is not justified by a doctor's note, prohibiting parents from excusing their child's absence through a note explaining that they were at home on the day of the absence.

In the past, a student with no credit in a class due to absences can make up the days they missed through Saturday school attendance, tutoring hours or proof of community service. The policy put into effect on Jan. 1 eliminates the option of using community service to recover credit and only leaves tutoring outside of school hours and Saturday school as means to recover credit. Furthermore, students only have 30 days after the start of the semester to turn in hours to make up for their absences from the previous semester.



Comic by Rachel Wolleben.

The attendance policy is inconsistent with the desire of AISD to ensure that every student graduates on time, but it also is unfairly biased towards those with better access to the resources required to maintain 90 percent attendance. The piece that makes the least sense is the idea that if a student is sick, their only two options are to go to a doctor or go to school. Doctor's appointments are expensive and unnecessary with most common illnesses. Attending school with an illness prevents the student from recovery and exposes other students and faculty to contamination. Even if a student just left their illnesses unexcused, they would

have to carefully plan to miss less than 10 percent of their classes, which is unreasonable since there's no way to calculate how often you'll be sick.

Restoring credit for one class requires a minimum of four hours of tutoring, or one morning of Saturday school. But if a lack of transportation, family emergencies or chronic illness is the reason for the student missing the in the first place, it isn't logical to assume the student will have the time to recover all of the hours they missed. There needs to be a system in place to account for circumstances students and parents simply can't control, but this attendance policy removes the ability for parents to decide when it is inappropriate for their child to show up to class, and this is a right every parent should have. To take that right away is to overstep a school district's jurisdiction.

Of course it is practical for the school to keep some sort of accountability in place for students who don't have a proper reason for missing class or use false community service hours to avoid having to make up the work they've missed. The school administration is merely following a policy dictated by Texas legislation; however, the methods that the central administration are prescribing in order to enforce the law are both unreasonable and unfair.

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